

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Christensen Wants To Know If Territory Hospitals Are Prepared For Ebola

Health / **Published On October 20, 2014 09:49 AM /**

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Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen, in letters directed to Dr. Bernard Wheatley of the Schneider Regional Medical Center (SRMC) and Dr. Kendall Griffith of the Juan F. Luis Hospital (JFL), asked the two CEOs whether hospital staff had been properly trained to handle Ebola cases should they present at the hospitals.

Being a tourism destination, it is not impossible that the deadly disease could come to the shores of the Virgin Islands, therefore the delegate inquired whether a strategy was in place to deal with potential cases of Ebola and asked if the hospitals had problems implementing the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines.

"As a tourist destination, we are open to visitors from around the world," Delegate Christensen said. "Have you had problems implementing CDC guidance and does your hospital have protocols in place to screen patients for fever and immediately place them in separate waiting areas until further screening can be done? Since it is important that both hospital staff and patients be protected, has staff been trained on the appropriate protocols for handling patients?"

The Congresswoman went on to praise the Department of Health for reaching out to all providers, and said she was confident that local hospital staff would treat emergency situations with the care and competence that such situations require.

Her words were not as kind to the federal government, however, stating she was "extremely disappointed" that the Virgin Islands is not better prepared for the Ebola threat.

"As a former member of the Committee on Homeland Security who supported project bio shield and introduced legislation to speed up the development of cures for Ebola and other diseases that could be used as agents of bioterrorism, I am extremely disappointed that we are not better prepared today," Christensen said.

On Oct. 9 Griffith, along with with the Virgin Islands Government and the CDC, [reassured residents](#) of St. Croix that the hospital was taking precautionary steps in an effort to preempt any potential case of Ebola.

"Realizing the community's concerns about the potential threat of Ebola, we are reassuring residents of our collaborative measures to prevent the spread of the disease," the JFL CEO said. Adding that "there are no confirmed cases of Ebola in the Territory," Griffith noted that the hospital is "taking proactive steps as healthcare providers and informing the public of our efforts."

In relation to the preparedness of Juan Luis Hospital, Griffith said he and his team has been "finalizing protocols and taking precautions in the event that an individual presents with Ebola-like symptoms." The doctor also pointed out that the proper steps "to ensure that we have the infrastructure in place to respond safely and effectively to mitigate the risk of the virus spreading" have been taken, meeting with stakeholders in an effort to foster seamless communication in case of an Ebola outbreak in the territory.

Ebola is an infectious and generally fatal disease marked by fever and severe internal bleeding. It is spread through contact with infected bodily fluids. Its host species is unknown.

Ebola symptoms include:

- Fever (greater than 38.6°C or 101.5°F)
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Weakness
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal (stomach) pain
- Unexplained hemorrhage (bleeding or bruising)

Symptoms may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to the virus, but the average is 8 to 10 days.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), recovery from Ebola depends on good supportive clinical care and the patient's immune response. People who recover from Ebola infection develop antibodies that last for at least 10 years.

## Prevention

- Wash hands frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Avoid contact with blood and bodily fluids of any person, particularly someone who is sick
- Do not handle items that may have come in contact with an infected person's blood or bodily fluids
- Do not touch the body of someone who has died from Ebola
- Do not touch or eat bats and nonhuman primates or their blood
- Avoid hospitals where Ebola patients are being treated

The Centers for Disease Control has issued a travel warning for countries in West Africa that are currently affected by the Ebola outbreak, including Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. ***US residents are strongly advised to avoid nonessential travel to these destinations.*** If you must travel (for example, to do humanitarian aid work in response to the outbreak) protect yourself by following [CDC's advice](#) for avoiding contact with the blood and bodily fluids of Ebola patients or those who have died from the virus.